

Rector O'Brien: On being English in a new Québec

Rector John O'Brien addressed McGill Convocation last week and spoke of the anglophone's place in Quebec society.

Dr. O'Brien received an LL.D., honoris causa, at the McGill convocation. Earlier in the month, the Rector was honoured at Bishop's University's convocation when he was awarded a D.C.L. degree, honoris causa.

When one contemplates the topic for a convocation address, one faces a choice between a topic that is made timely by current events, or one that arises out of the background and personal experience of the speaker. In my own case, I find the two approaches irresistably impelling me towards a particular subject. By coincidence this convocation occurs two days after a provincial election, which itself followed a period of turbulent events and concerns in Quebec, not least among its English-speaking citizens. Bill 22, strikes in the schools and CEGEPs, proposed immigration legislation have concerned both the English speaking citizen in general and those of us who have a more particular connection with and concern for our universities. I have, myself, been a representative of my own university, in one capacity or another since the early 1960's, on various governmental bodies dealing with the development of education in Quebec, and I have talked with others who have had the same experience. I have on occasion found myself the only anglophone member of a particular body. I would therefore like to say something about the position in Quebec today of the English-speaking group and its institutions (particularly in education) as I see it, and also about the experience of the past fifteen years (including some of the errors).



Dr. John O'Brien

I believe that the English-speaking group and the use of the English language will continue to have a solid place in Quebec. (By "English-speaking group" I mean to cover that group of people of heterogeneous origins who now speak English as their main Quebec language — in this context we can make no useful distinction between those of British or of other ethnic origins.) I also believe that there have been changes in the past decade to which the English-speaking group must and can adapt. If this is done, a more positive spirit will prevail over the often sour attitudes that appear at the present time. If this is not done, the future of English is not really at risk (it is difficult to believe that French could eradicate English in this North American context in which we live), but living in Quebec will be less pleasant than it might be.

The key changes that have taken place

are not just that French is becoming a more prevalent language than it used to be, but also that all parts of Quebec society are being forced to be more interdependent than they used to be. Such has been a world trend in recent decades, usually under the influence of increased governmental activity, and it has arrived in Quebec later than elsewhere. English-speaking Quebecers, who as recently as a decade ago still formed a largely autonomous group in Quebec, and whose institutions, such as schools, universities and hospitals, were in practice largely independent of the Quebec government, now find themselves increasingly integrated into the "Quebec system". Whether or not the world political trend toward increasing influence of government has reached its peak (some observers suggest it has), it is unlikely that the new reality of Quebec will reverse itself in the foreseeable future, or that the English-

speaking will reestablish their previous position of virtual autonomy.

In short, the English in Quebec are now much more like other minority groups in western societies than they used to be, or than they are accustomed to viewing themselves. (Admittedly, since they are also a part of the Canadian majority, their minority status in Quebec is somewhat attenuated.) However, I would suggest that we might benefit by viewing ourselves squarely in this role, and then recognizing

that minority groups do in fact prosper, preserve their vital interests, and contribute to the general welfare of the total society when they make a realistic use of their position.

What can we learn from other groups that, though minorities, have succeeded? Three things, I would suggest. First, learn to function in the language of the majority. As one born and bred in an English-speaking part of Canada, and with an accent that avoids any risk of being taken for a native speaker of French, I emphasize that this does not mean to speak perfectly. In the past the English-speaking people of Quebec often lacked realistic opportunities to use French effectively, and for many it may not make much sense to start learning it now. But the younger people have much less cause to complain about lack of opportunity today. The trick is to make the initial effort, which may be difficult or unpleasant. The rest will follow.

Second, participate in the economic and political life of Quebec. To those graduating and in the early stages of a career, be prepared to take up challenges and opportunities that will place you in contact with the economic and political activities of this province. Not everyone will find his future in this direction, but there is no reason for the English to abandon whole areas of activity. To take an easy example, the growing use of French will not, I believe, cause the English to abandon the practice of law to their French-speaking colleagues. To take a hard example, there is no reason that the English should allow the Quebec civil service to remain a virtual monopoly of French Quebecers; there is undoubtedly an interesting and challenging future open in Quebec City to the resolute and qualified English Quebecer who is prepared to seek a career in that direction rather than in Ottawa. For that matter, many a Quebec civil servant moves on to Ottawa later in his career anyway. In these matters no one should see himself making a personal sacrifice to ensure an English presence in Quebec. He should see himself broadening his own opportunities by rejecting an artificial limitation to his career prospects because of language. Of course not everyone will go these routes. But the opportunities are there, and the English

minority can only weaken itself by admitting that certain areas of activity are closed to it because it does not belong to the majority in this province.

Third, there is determination to continue to exist. The French, after all, continued to exist two hundred years after the Battle of the Plains of Abraham, despite being a minority in North America. And when changing times destroyed the social basis in accordance with which they had existed those two hundred years, they fought back in the last two decades with new ways of preserving the French language and French culture. Are the English, who by now have also been in Quebec for a long time, less tenacious in holding onto their place? Some current attitudes might lead one to think that we are on the point of retreating over the border as soon as possible. Such is not the case, the English are firmly implanted in this province and will remain so.

One must ask the majority the exercise of reasonable tolerance and goodwill...

I would like to add a word about the attitude of the French majority. One must ask of a majority the exercise of a reasonable tolerance and good will towards the minorities in its midst. Despite the pressure of the times, we have seen a good deal of this in the university sphere over the years. The fact is that the English-language universities are still here, and if they have not always prospered as they might like, their treatment does stand comparison with universities elsewhere. Naturally, we give ourselves a good deal of the credit for this, but it is worth remembering that educational policy in Quebec has supported the purposes of the English-language institutions as full members of the Quebec university system.

In concluding these remarks, I will give two examples of the difficulties English Quebec has had in functioning as an effective minority. Both are examples from the educational sphere, both are now well in the past, but nevertheless illustrate how things may go wrong for a minority group that is not alert to the context in which it lives.

In the early 1960's, as the Quiet Revolution was gathering speed, the Department of Education formed a number of consulta-

tive committees to which were submitted various changes in regulations under consideration. The English were well represented proportionately on these committees, and also, since they were large groups, well represented in absolute numbers. The English members did not, in general, make as effective a contribution to the deliberations as might have been expected. There were two reasons for this. First, many of them did not understand enough French to follow effectively the deliberations of the committee. Second and more importantly, many of the English members were firmly convinced that what was under discussion was the reform of the French-language educational system, and that the English system would not be affected. In due course the committees made recommendations, and new regulations were issued applying to the entire educational system. The English were astounded at the result, even to the point of alleging that they had not been consulted. The French were astounded at the English reaction, since for them the purpose of the exercise had been to establish reforms on the Quebec-wide basis.

In the early 1970's the Department of Education set out to induce the universities to agree on a common nomenclature for degrees. The main purpose of the exercise was directed toward French-language usage which, drawing as it did on the practices of France and of North America, sometimes designated what was essentially the same degree by different names. This project underwent many a weary recycling before it ended in a document for the most part acceptable to the parties concerned. A significant amount of time was spent over the issues of Honours programmes in the English universities. Draft after draft left these programmes out, leading to suspicions that since the French universities did not have Honours programmes, the English universities were being forced to drop them. It eventually became clear that this was not the situation at all; the explanation was that the drafters believed that Honours programmes were the same as the baccalauréats spécialisés in the French universities, and that in providing for the latter they automatically provided for Honours programmes as well. A niche was then found for them with no great difficulty.

These examples indicate the need to be in touch with events in order to avoid positions taking form without appropriate input. They also indicate that, language and cultural differences being what they are, effort and openness on both sides are necessary to a sound outcome. By the mid-1970's we have surely accumulated enough experience to ensure an effective interrelationship between French and English, if we have the will to do so.

Loyola students help cripples walk

"If you're a mechanical engineer, you can do anything!" declares engineering prof Dr. A. Jaan Saber.

That attitude, coupled with a growing awareness of the plight of the paraplegic, is responsible for the success of a student project in Dr. Saber's "Introduction to Engineering Design" class.

The problem was to design a device that would aid paraplegics from a standing to a sitting position and vice versa. It was assigned to two groups of four students in September and the first group — Gerry Bush, Bill Hanley, Ron Jankowski and Pete Ryan — unveiled its creation last week.

According to Gerry Bush, the group's aim was to "make the device simple; to help simplify the processes of sitting and standing without being cumbersome."

The students' first stop was the Montreal Rehabilitation Institute where they attempted to determine the problems faced by paraplegics and the inadequacies of present devices.

They were concerned that the device they designed be acceptable to paraplegics and be "good to live with" and decided that a modification of the leg brace that is currently in use would meet their objectives.

Today's brace, often used in conjunction with canes, is locked at the knee so that it cannot bend. With the legs locked in an unbent position, sitting and standing become difficult operations.

The modified brace uses springs and ratchets at the knees. In a standing position, the ratchets are locked and the knees cannot bend or buckle. When the wearer wants to sit, he first positions himself in front of the chair. Then, releasing the ratchets and keeping his feet on the ground, he lowers himself into the chair. The ratchets lock the flexed springs and prevent his legs from kicking out.

The flexed springs store energy which is used to help the wearer into an upright position. To stand, he releases the ratchets, adjusting his weight so the legs don't flip out, and straightens up; the ratchets lock when he is upright.

The prototype could not be demonstrated by a paraplegic as braces are normally custom-made to prevent damage to the paralysed legs and financial constraints prevented this from being done. However, the students assured FYI that a custom-built brace of their design would be a great



Gerry Bush, Ron Jankowski [wearing brace] and Pete Ryan

advantage to a paraplegic and would cause no damage to the legs.

It was also stressed that the mechanism, consisting as it does of only a brace, a ratchet and a spring, is very simple and as a

result "little can go wrong" with it.

The project was funded by the university (\$200 per group) and advice and some materials were provided by the Montreal Rehabilitation Institute.

Ken Torrens, 22, valedictorian and winner of the Malone Medal at last spring's Loyola convocation, recently took on the job of campus ombudsman.

"I know it sounds like a cliché, but it's a very challenging job," he said. "People have a lot of problems and it's good to be able to help them."

Ken said that most problems concern student-faculty relations. "There's one group of students who want to get a professor fired because he can't teach," he said.

"My job is to mediate between them and

try to get things sorted out to everyone's satisfaction."

Ken said there were also problems of students attempting to get through the university's red tape. "I have to deal with their financial problems too."

His predecessor, Simone de Smit left to live with her husband in Oklahoma where he plays for a professional hockey team. "I got word from her not long ago. I don't think she finds Oklahoma compares very well with Montreal in terms of what you can do."

Like it or not, We're second rate, says professor

Loyola Classics professor Daniel Brown will not win any popularity contests for classifying Concordia as a "second-rate university", but he stresses that "second-rate" is not necessarily a negative term and adds that "second-rate" has a real purpose in the society."

According to Dr. Brown, Concordia must come to grips with its actual situation: as an institution that is "not heavily endowed, not heavily financed", it is "condemned" to second-rate status and, as such, must "realize its limitations, which are almost always financial."

The outlook isn't completely grim. There are advantages to both students and faculty in a so-called second-rate institution.

Students who are "late-bloomers" have an opportunity to succeed in post-secondary education; an opportunity which would not be offered by a prestigious university.

"We get students who have not had very advantageous primary and secondary schooling; their experience in CEGEP has been indifferent. They come to Loyola instead of getting a job; very often they find that they are really intrigued by some academic subject... After a slow start, they do very well and go on and become outstanding. Without the second-rate institution, they would have got nowhere".

Brown claims that the teaching environment is often more "congenial" at a second-rate university than it is at a large prestigious university.

"Faculty members at prestigious first-rate institutions are inevitably channelled into their speciality; whatever they did their doctoral dissertation on, that's what they're going to do research on... for the rest of

their lives." At a second-rate university "the professors can ride off in all directions" and teach subjects not necessarily tied to his discipline.

"There are many teachers who, on paper, are not that well qualified... Many would-be scholars are turned off by what is required for doctoral requirements and give up serious attempts to publish regularly." At the second-rate university "there is place for the professor who is primarily interested in being a teacher."

Dr. Brown feels that the second-rate university should function within the bounds of its limited financial resources and should eliminate costly programs. It "ought to concentrate on things that don't cost money... not try to do everything, not try to have every department in every field in every subject because, inevitably that would be spreading ourselves so thin that the library resources, the physical resources, the staff resources would just be woefully insufficient."

"What such a university ought to do is concentrate on liberal arts... concentrate on things which are a basic for university education but which are the least expensive... There are only 37 plays of Shakespeare; we can afford all 37 plays in our library and McGill doesn't have a 38th play and Harvard a 39th play; we get the standard things..."

"I personally believe that we ought to cut out all post-graduate programs, that Concordia University is not a university at which to pursue post-graduate studies. And if what Rector O'Brien says is true, that our funds are limited, then we ought to see that they are expended upon making the best undergraduate education we can possibly give because post-graduate education, as every university administrator will admit, is a very, very expensive thing."

"We ought to be quiet honest. What we are doing, for the masses of our students, is not training scholars... The mass of our students, who are really here for their major or for some other reason, or who feel that what they ought to do is get a college degree and then they really don't know..."

(must) get as much as they can possibly absorb. The best thing that we can do and what we ought to try to do is give students up to the bachelor's degree the best education that we can.

"But assuming a floodgate (admissions) policy... it is important that we emphasize a kind of difference, as we do between regular and honours programs; the students who show the ability and interest have to be, not completely segregated... but students who are really good in any given area have to be given an opportunity to be together with fellow students who are also very good in that area, with professors who are very good, and be left on their own to pursue subjects as far as they can pursue them."

"We don't have to write a second-rate university on our flag, and hoist it on the pole every morning at sunrise. (But) one of our responsibilities is to apprise our students of the university's and the student's own situation."

On Tuesday, January 25, 1977, the Loyola Commerce and Administration Students' Association of Concordia University, in conjunction with the Canadian Red Cross will be sponsoring one of Quebec's largest one-day annual blood drives.

We hope the Alumni at Loyola will make every effort to make the drive a success.

Once again, we appeal to your generosity in supporting this life-giving event. Contributions to be used as door prizes would be greatly appreciated, and would enable our blood drive to be an even greater success this year, and help us reach or objective of 1,000 pints.

Donations of sponsors will be publicly acknowledged. Should you wish to contact me please feel free to do so at 482-1655, or leave a message with Janet Desbarats, secretary, at 482-9280.

ALUMNEWS

The Association wishes to thank those who have contributed to the John E. Williams Memorial Fund.

Furthermore, we would like to announce that donations are being accepted for the fund.

Donations should be made to the John E. Williams Memorial Fund, Loyola Alumni

Association, 7141 Sherbrooke Street West, Montreal, Quebec.

Withold Robert Lopatto '74, informs us that he is a teaching assistant at McMaster University and is in the university co-op program. If any alumni wish to know more about the program, he asks them to contact him at 39 Gwendolen Ave., Willowdale, Ontario.

Michael F. Ciavaglia '72 was married August 28 to Patricia A. Eakins (Queen's '74). Michael is presently in his final year of Law (LL.B.) at McGill.

Normand Bouclin '66, of Sudbury, Ont., died Dec. 1 at the age of 33, after being involved in a traffic accident in Toronto.